



Slovene Myths

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SLOVENE MYTHS¹

THE Slovenes are sometimes referred to as a people without a history. It is a misleading statement, and in view of its implications unjust. For centuries before the rise of the Frank Empire they enjoyed independence, had their own tribal principalities and organisations, and were—this much one can gather from the various traditions—a courageous people, but peace-loving and not aggressive. I take it that it is by no means settled whether the Southern Slavs were already more or less established in their present territory at the time of the Great Migration. Certainly they suffered much from the Huns and, later on, from the Avars during that age of unrest. It was Charlemagne, as the first exponent of the German “*Drang nach Osten*,” who definitely occupied their lands in or about 802. As a matter of fact the Franks and Bavarians came to the Slovene lands for much the same reason (i.e. more or less by invitation) as the Angles and Saxons came to Britain. Southern Slav territory in the Eastern Alps and northern Adriatic littoral remained part of the Holy Roman Empire, subsequently became attached to the Habsburg lands and shared in all the vicissitudes of the Habsburg Empire until its dissolution in 1918. Its fate since then is modern history and lives in all our memories and knowledge.

Thus it came about that the most western of the Southern Slavs grew up under the permanent shadow of alien domination. But in the safe seclusion of little-known Alpine valleys old traditions and beliefs lived on in spite of political and religious oppression. Echoes and shadows of pagan divinities haunt you to this day on lonely *planine*,² by the shores of torrential rivers, about the orifices of unexplored caves, in the depths of forests practically virgin, and in every peasant custom.

In spite of the long centuries of German domination, the Slovenes preserved the old racial name, their language, and racial characteristics. They even (in later ages) developed a literature in the native idiom, and their sense of nationality was never quite obscured—all of which is a great testimonial to the vitality and tenacity of the Alpine Jugoslavs. Hence it is also not surprising that a fairly large stock of native myths, tales, and customs should have survived.

¹ *Bajke in Pripovedke Slovenskega Ljudstva*, edited by Jakob Kelemina. (Popular Myths and Folk Tales of the Slovenes. Published by the Družba Sv. Mohorja, Celje, Yugoslavia. Price, 46.- Din.)

² (Alpine pastures; the German “*Alm*”—not hills or mountains, as in Serbo-Croatian.)

It is only recently, however, that Slovene scholars have begun to take a scientific interest in this national treasure, and comparatively little was done to rescue it from oblivion. Every student of folk-lore knows how excessively difficult it is to collect material stored mainly in the memories of old men and women in remote villages and lonely cottages where ancient dialects are still spoken and the natives scarcely less shy of a stranger than the wild creatures of forest and mountain. In the former Austrian provinces of Jugoslavia there is the added difficulty that the culture of the educated classes was almost exclusively German and in itself constituted a regrettable barrier between them and their own people.

In *Bajke in Pripovedke Slovenskega Ljudstva* Dr. Kelemina has stored the results of practically all that has been done so far in the way of collecting Slovene myths and folk-tales in a single book, which is so highly compressed as to correspond to a much larger volume.

Dr. Kelemina groups his tales and myths according to subject, viz. I, Spirits; II, Fairies and Beings akin to them; III, Demonic Beings; IV, The Ruler of the Heavens; V, the World and World Order; VI, Heroic Themes. The motives and manner of his classification may not please everybody. Owing to the typical development of folk-lore the same entities appear in different categories, e.g. as divinities, then as fairies or demons, and finally as national heroes or notable enemies. But the entire book is in such a handy form, the wealth of information it contains is so vast and so liberally given, that this is a detail, besides being a matter of opinion. The sole and supreme purpose of the book is to rescue the traditions of the Slovene common people from oblivion and not at all to give literary shape or coherence to these traditions. Dr. Kelemina gives his material exactly as he found it, often in mere scraps and remnants of tales, not unlike the impression left by an imperfectly remembered dream; sometimes, but unfortunately all too rarely, in the form of coherent stories. The bald phraseology of Dr. Kelemina's narratives is not altogether a learned affectation. It corresponds to the slow speech and limited vocabulary of the original narrators. In actual life I have known such recitals supplemented by some simple gesture, impressively dramatic because of its brusque contrast with the subdued monotony of the narration. One day I was walking up the hillock in Kamnik, which is the site of the *Mali Grad*, and the old town clerk told me the story of the wicked countess who use to live there—the Snake Woman of the folk-tale. "May I be turned into a snake on the spot if I give a penny piece to the poor," said the

countess. And scarcely were the words out of her mouth than she began to turn into a snake, from her feet upwards. And when she was a snake up to her waist, she laid hold of the stone jamb of the door—here——” and suddenly the old gentleman fitted his hand into a natural hollow in the stone which exactly fitted the thumb and extended fingers of a human hand. Not a word, not a dynamic accent to stress the despair which gave the soft hand of a delicate lady strength to mould the stone like dough—only a pause to let me fill that in mentally for myself. Then he finished the sentence: “and the impression of her hand has been there ever since . . . But in another moment she was all snake and wriggled away into *this* hole——” Then he wound up regretfully: “The impression used to be much clearer; but some Croatian tourists chipped away bits of the stone and the thumb mark has lost its shape.” In this part of the world acts of tripper vandalism are for preference laid to the charge of Croatian visitors. It does not mean anything and the accusation is often unfounded, of course. I remember that when I was a small girl in Aberdeenshire we used to credit all visitors “frae the sooth” with corresponding enormities.

In compiling his book Dr. Kelemina has tapped every source available at present, modestly expressing the hope that others will continue the work he has carried on to this present point. His notes and bibliography occupy 27 pages in very small print. Of his authorities I will mention only three, not so much because of their importance for Dr. Kelemina's book as because they are the most likely to interest the average reader, and because every one who knows anything about Slovene Yugoslavia is already familiar with their names, viz., Valvasor, whose monumental work *Die Ehre des Herzogthums Krain* (published in 1689) contains many references to Slovene beliefs and traditions; Fran Levstik, the centenary of whose birth was recently celebrated and who is by no means to be confused with the now living Vladimir Levstik, author of *Gadje Gnezdo* (An Adder's Nest); and F. Kocbek, whose *Savinjske Alpe* is an excellent guide-book for that Alpine range north of the Sava which is commonly spoken of in Ljubljana as the Kamnik Alps and as the Savinja Alps in Styria. This rugged mountain complex has to this day remained comparatively impervious to modern influences and the population on its habitable fringes is very conservative. Kocbek's book contains valuable information for the botanist, the geologist, and, above all, the folk-lore student, no less than for the mountaineer.

The first part of Dr. Kelemina's book consists of an Introduction,

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which is, in fact, a monograph on the entire subject of Slovene mythology and folk-lore, and compresses a vast amount of exceedingly interesting information into the small bulk of 30 pages. With this compendious Introduction as a guide and the plain uncorrupted text of the myths and folk-tales as given in the body of the book it is possible to get a fair idea of Slovene mythology in olden times and of the beliefs and traditions in which its survivals are embodied to this day.

The most comprehensive collection of Slovene folk-tales previous to Dr. Kelemina's book was Kotnik's *Storije I*, published in 1924 by the Družba Sv. Mohorja. This book was compiled solely for scientific reference, and one of the purposes of Dr. Kelemina in writing his own book was to continue and supplement what Kotnik had begun. Another frequently quoted source is Štrekelj's collection of national ballads.

The word "bajka" is used in the sense of "myth" as generally understood, i.e. a tale dealing with pagan religious ideas, with gods and demi-gods. Very few true myths have survived among the Slovenes, the most important being that of *Kresnik* (or *Krsnik*), whose name Kelemina derives from the same root as that of the Slav word meaning "resurrection." This is most probably correct. Popularly, the name is sometimes connected with "kres." A "kres" is a bonfire, and more particularly the bonfire lighted on midsummer night. The original Kresnik was of divine origin, son of the Lord of the Universe, and delegated by him to be the special divinity and saviour of the Slovenes. With the advent of Christianity the divinity of Kresnik was explained away. He became the Slovene Prince of a legendary age, a scholar wise in white magic, and eventually a national hero, a peasant youth who fought the terrible Huns or Avars, the "dog-headed men" of Slovene popular tradition.

The old myths were set forth in verse and developed into ballads which were often of considerable length. Notable examples of Slovene national ballad poetry are the ballad of Trdoglav and Marjetica, the ballad of Vida the Fair, and the heroic Kralj Matjaž cycle. The oldest of Slovene legends were all handed down in verse, and it was only after the poetic form was forgotten that the shorter, unadorned prose form took its place. In these ballads it is interesting to study the progress of the central figure from divinity to national hero. Folk-tales and fairy-tales represent later stages in the development, but, of course, in practice it is impossible to draw a hard and fast line between myths, folk-tales, and fairy-tales. Speaking generally one may accept Dr. Kelemina's definition that the true fairy-

tale has this in common with the myth, that its chief characters are likewise of the supernatural order. But the fairy-tale is more highly developed; the myth has become embellished, it has become art fiction, often with a definite distinctive style. On the other hand the topic of myth and folk-tale alike is a matter of fact for the people. The *Vile*, the *Povodni mož* (Water Man), the *Pošasti* (ghosts, apparitions), *Volkodlaki* (werewolves), and *vampires*, etc., are real beings and what is told of them took place—nay, perhaps still takes place—here in our midst, among those ruins, in that cave, that pool, that forest . . . The domain of the fairy-tale is the “Ninth Country” of Slav speech, the land for ever round the corner, where the rainbow ends, the realm of imagination.

The fact is that folk-lore was, and is, made and carried on by people belonging to types not easily understood and still more easily misunderstood by their fellow-creatures. The original myth, I take it, was created by sages who preferred to teach in parable. Later generations took the parable literally, and perhaps forgot the teaching. The supernatural element in folk and fairy tales is not exclusively due to the mythological background. Folklore is largely created and kept alive by poets and psychics. I use the term “psychic” without prejudice, so to say, in the sense in which it is generally employed, i.e. implying an ability to perceive matters not perceptible to the majority of people. All explanations of this are beside the mark here. If the Green Hunter has been seen by X or N in one of his traditional haunts in the glens of the Kamnik Alps that is good enough foundation for a new folk-tale about him. Presently someone with imagination will embellish the tale, and the oftener it is repeated and the more a romantic belief in it is diluted with a realisation of its physical improbability the less will the narrator scruple to elaborate and embroider it. Besides this psychic element there is that of outstanding historic events and persons, looming monstrous and shadowy in the far-away past. It is not absolutely certain when the Slovenes came to their present home. If the evidence of place-names goes for anything it was at a date far more remote than the usually accepted “some time during the 6th century A.D.” Confused traditions and distorted memories of their predecessors in the land haunt their folk-lore without giving anything like a precise clue as to the extent of time during which the two populations must have lived side by side, the Slavs growing stronger and more settled, their predecessors decreasing in numbers, retreating into mountain fastnesses, caves, and forests, and finally disappearing in so far as they were not assimilated. The Huns,

Avars, Hungarians and Pechenegs contributed a special chapter to Slovene folk-lore, which makes no distinction between these different peoples. The Slovenes were struck by the bulldog physiognomy of the ferocious Tartar invaders, and where we should speak of "simian" types they coined the term *pesoglavci*, i.e. dogheads. Their chief, of whom I shall say more later on, was (according to Dr. Kelemina) a legendary personality based upon the historic Attila.

As the folk-lore of the Slovenes is deeply rooted in the pagan mythology and religion of their forefathers, Dr. Kelemina has a good deal to say about both in his Introduction. The Slovenes believed in a large number of gods. Some of their most ancient divinities got lost, so to speak, during long wanderings before they reached their present home, and do not concern us here. To one deity with a triple aspect of "three heads" a certain pre-eminence was given, and to this divinity the Slovenes assigned the loftiest mountain in the land for his high seat and abode. If you ask a Slovene—any Slovene—who was the chief pagan god of his people the unhesitating answer is invariably "Triglav." And hereby it is not the mountain that is meant but the god, although in course of time the divine abode and the divine entity became more or less identified, especially for purposes of worship. Dr. Kelemina suggests that this chief divinity of the Slovenes was worshipped under the name of *Svarog* (Tvarog), Ruler of the Heavens. Svarog had a son, *Svarožič* (dim. of Svarog), also called Božič, i.e. Little God. The winter solstice was the festival of Svarožič or Božič. Dr. Kelemina says that to this day the yule-log is locally called "božič" by the Slovenes. The Yugoslav term for Christmas ("Božič"), therefore, goes back to pre-Christian times, and the Divine Infant of that festival was originally a pagan deity, whose very name and feast could be transferred without difficulty to the Christ Child of the new faith. Other divinities mentioned by Dr. Kelemina are *Netek*, *Jutrman*, *Kurent*, *Belin*, *Zora* (the Dawn), and *Deva* (sister-bride of the divinity of spring).

Opposed to the gods were the spirits of evil, *Bes*, *Črt*, *Vrag*, *Vedi*, *Mora*, and a host of other unpleasant beings. Of course, the terms "good" and "evil" are not used here with reference to any moral qualities but merely to indicate a friendly or unfriendly attitude towards mankind. As a matter of fact every spirit or divinity has a good and evil aspect, an obverse and a reverse, as it were.

Dr. Kelemina quotes a charming story of the Creation. He calls it pagan, but it is strictly monotheistic:—

From the beginning of things God slept. In the fullness of time

He awoke and looked about Him. And as He looked His glances created the visible universe. And God was so pleased with His work that He journeyed forth to visit it. But the journey was long, so that He grew hot and the sweat started from His brow. And as He returned to His own place a drop of His sweat fell to the earth, and from this drop the first man was born. Man is born of the sweat of God and in the sweat of his brow he must earn his bread.

Among these divinities, *Kurent* (Korant, Kore) was held in especially high honour by the Slovenes. He is essentially Slav and Aryan, and stands for the inextinguishable life-force which wanes only to wax again. He was associated with the moon, which is sometimes given as his ultimate abode. Popularly he was (one is almost tempted to say *is*) the god of merriment; but he was also the Slovene Dionysus. The vine was sacred to him. Tuesday was his day, and his season that which is now our carnival—a time of merry-making and courtship in preparation for the great revival of spring-time. It was from the moon that Kurent looked down upon the earth, when the Ruler of the World had overwhelmed it with the Flood because of the wickedness that prevailed therein. And there Kurent saw a man who had laid hold of a vine to steady himself in the midst of the waters. And Kurent was glad that the man should have turned to the plant that was sacred to himself. So he drew up the vine and caused it to grow right up to the moon. And the man climbed up the vine and was saved, and became the forefather of the Slovenes.

It is not illogical that in the last of the metamorphoses which the advent of Christianity caused this divinity to pass through he should take service with Kralj Matjaž as his armourer. For the great king and his host are not dead but only bound in magic slumber in the heart of a mountain until the supreme moment shall arrive when they will come forth to do battle once more in the cause of right and freedom. The new faith could deprive Kurent of his divinity but not of his vitality. In medieval fairy and folk tale we recognise him in the Mighty Smith, or the magic fiddler, to whose tune all the world must dance. He laughs at death, and sets Hell at defiance.

Specifically Slovene in this Jugoslav pantheon is *Kresnik* (Krsnik), and Dr. Kelemina claims for him that there is no figure quite like him to be found elsewhere. Kresnik has distinctly both a divine and a human aspect. In his divine aspect he was the god of the spring sunshine, of the great annual rebirth of nature. He was the dragon-slayer, who delivered his people and his sister-bride from the monster. He was really identical with Svarožič, and his true home

was in the Ninth Country, where he dwelt in the Golden Palace on the Crystal Mountain, and the apples of immortality grew in his garden. In so far as Kresnik was a *tribal* divinity he later on became "rationalised" into a great Slovene prince of olden time. He cleared the Slovene lands of monsters, slew the dragon (the dragon can still be seen in the arms of the city of Ljubljana) and delivered the Maiden (Deva, *Vesina*), his sister and fore-ordained spouse, from magic captivity. With her he lived happily and gloriously until he was beguiled into unfaithfulness and fell a victim to the outraged love of his wife. This legend has points in common with the Sigurd Saga. As a Slovene prince, skilled in magic but human, Kresnik was supposed to have lived at Vurberk, in Styria. As a matter of fact "Kresnik" is not a personal name but a term employed to designate the tutelary tribal demi-god, and it is a mystery name. The Kresniki were destined from birth for their mission as rulers and protectors of their tribe; they were instructed in magic by the *vile* and later on exercised their powers to defend their tribe against the attacks of hostile magicians such as the wicked Count Vidovina, who appears in several tales given by Dr. Kelemina. After the introduction of Christianity the Kresniki were still credited with a knowledge of magic, but were supposed to have acquired it at the School of Black Magic in Babylon. Yet even as student of the Black Art Kresnik does not belie his original character, and usually plays the part of a generous and powerful friend of the poor.

Vesnik is obviously the deity of spring (*Vesna* = spring). Dr. Kelemina says of him that it is not at all easy to keep him separate from Kresnik. Judging by the material in Dr. Kelemina's book and the myths and legends about these two beings I think one might say they are two aspects of one and the same divinity. *Vesnik*, however, does not seem to have a human aspect at all. He is something of a Slovene Baldur. The advent of spring was his festival, which used to be celebrated about the end of April. He had a mortal foe in his own younger brother (sometimes it is a half-brother), who is referred to as *Jarnik*, would fain supplant him, seeks to slay him and usually succeeds. This brother is supposed to stand for the fierce midsummer sun which ousts the gentler sun of spring. He might be called the Slovene Phoebus, and like him his weapon was the bow and arrow, which in later ages he discarded for the gun. His feast was midsummer, and is still celebrated with much lighting of bonfires. When the Slovenes became Christians the legacy of *Vesnik-Kresnik*—spring festival, protectorship of the Slovenes, dragon, and all—was taken over by St. George, who in this capacity

is always called *Zeleni Jurij* (Green George). Dr. Kelemina is probably right in assuming that it is his jealous brother and supplanter who eventually evolved into the *Zeleni Lovec* (Green Hunter), hero or villain of innumerable tales and legends. As the mortal enemy of the patron of the land, the Green Hunter often even gets mixed up with the Devil. In any case the Slovene Devil is not black or red, but *green*. "A hundred thousand Green Ones!" is a common expletive. Dr. Kelemina complains that these three entities, viz. the genius of spring, the tutelary saint, and the Green Hunter (*Jarnik*) are apt to get hopelessly confused in Slovene folk-lore as regards their festivals and even their attributes. I venture to suggest that this may be partly the fault of the Slovene climate. In Alpine Slovenia, in especial, spring and summer are very often, to all intents and purposes, one season—a long, beautiful spring, cut short by our early autumn. Very rarely can the "Green George" of spring be celebrated on St. George's Day. The open-air entertainment at Ljubljana Castle, which is the chief attraction of the feast, is always advertised as going to take place "weather permitting." And as a rule the weather does not permit until a good deal later in the season.

One often hears of a "lost" goddess of the old Slovenes, *Živa* or *Siva*, goddess of Youth and Love. Although Dr. Kelemina does not even mention her, he gives much information regarding *Deva* (the Maiden) sister and spouse of the Sun Hero or the genius of spring, as the case may be. And he speaks of *Zora*, goddess of the dawn, and occasionally of the sunset, too. The Slovene, it must be remembered, has only one term for the red of the sunrise and that of the sunset. In the Kresnik Cycle, *Zora* is the daughter of the Snake Queen, i.e. the Night. In the pathetic folk-tale of *Zarika*, Queen of Spain in the West, and *Sončica* (Little Sun), her younger sister, who comes to her from the Land of the Morning, *Zora* (*Zarika* is only a diminutive) is surely the setting sun.

Netek is a restless, greedy person, but well disposed towards those who entertain him hospitably. Dr. Kelemina suggests that he probably stands for the terrestrial fire—or even for fire or the sun warmth in general.

One gains the impression that the personalities of many of the old Slovene divinities are exceedingly nebulous—possibly they always were so. Often it is impossible to determine whether two or more of them should be regarded as separate entities or as aspects of one. Probably it did not matter in the least at the time. The phenomenon is by no means unique in mythology.

The principal malevolent spirit (or spirits) went by the names of *Bes*, *Črt*, and *Vrag*. *Bes* is more or less forgotten, but *Črt* and *Vrag* are now two of the many names for the Devil, who quite naturally filled the same rôle with ill-will and all, when the Slovenes adopted Christianity. The Slovene hell, by the way, was originally not hot and red, but dark, cold, and somewhere underground on the far side of subterranean rivers. There is a suggestion of the cave world of the Slovene *Kras* in this ancient conception of hell. It was not a place of pain and punishment so much as a dismal abode where victims of enchantment languished in a sort of twilight death-in-life.

A personality as complex as that of the genius of spring or the young sun is that of his foe, whom Dr. Kelemina always (to simplify matters) speaks of as *Jarnik*, although in the different legends of the slaying he appears under different names. As the Green Hunter he is condemned to haunt the wild woods for ever. In this capacity he is decidedly what I for convenience sake (and in an entirely non-committal sense) prefer to call an elemental, and an evil one at that. But he must on no account be confused with the Wild Huntsman, who is *Wodan* and a German immigrant, a poacher in the preserves of the Slovene Green Hunter. The Green Hunter herds wolves as a shepherd herds sheep, wherefore he is sometimes called *Volčji Pastir*. It is because of him that the Slovene Devil is usually supposed to be green.

Dr. Kelemina is of opinion that the well-known folk-tale of *Zlatorog* is a variant of the myth of *Vesnik* and *Jarnik*. The good divinity appears in the form of the golden-horned buck chamois *Zlatorog*. His enemy and would-be slayer is the young hunter. In this case it is the hunter who is destroyed. Nevertheless, the region where the slaughter of *Zlatorog* was to have been compassed is laid waste and doomed to barrenness.

As time went on, the Green Hunter evolved into the Warlock Marksman (the German *Freischütz*), who by blasphemous spells possesses himself of bullets that cannot miss. Slovene folk-lore knows no end of tales about the Devil and the Green Hunter. Dr. Kelemina gives the gist of some of the most characteristic.

A place among the divinities should be accorded to the *Sojenice* or *Rojenice*, who correspond to the Greek Fates or the German Norns. One might call them the Queens of Destiny or Birth. Judging by the destinies these mighty ones usually allotted to the unfortunate infants over whose birth they presided, they should either be classed with the malevolent divinities or regarded as an expres-

sion of Slav pessimistic fatalism. Nevertheless, piety and common sense were sometimes too strong for fate. The lad who had been taught to undertake all that he did "in God's name," could not end as a melancholy suicide. The youth who would sooner trust himself to God's will in an open field than to the refuge of a strong tower of iron and stone was not slain by the flash of lightning that was to have brought death to him. But the strong tower was struck and reduced to atoms. Somebody, it seems, had got quite a good idea of what attracts lightning.

Speaking of inevitable destiny or innate fate, one might as well mention in this connection the curious popular custom—it amounted to a law—which decreed that if ten sons, no daughter between, are born to the house, the tenth, i.e. the youngest, was turned out into the world to shift for himself. The same thing applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the tenth daughter. That such *desetniki* or *desetnice*, compelled to lead what is more or less the life of a pariah, should eventually develop a roving and eccentric disposition was only natural. The result is that a person of restless temperament is often spoken of as a "tenth brother." The type is not uncommon among the Slovenes, and accounts for their being found, like the Scots, among immigrants and colonists all the world over.

It is not easy to draw a dividing line between former pagan divinities and a host of good and evil spirits who possess supernatural powers but cannot lay claim to divine rank. For the great majority of spirits Dr. Kelemina employs the collective Serbian term *zduha* or *zduhač*, a word intended to convey that the spirit—*duh*—can leave its body and go about business of its own without it, usually evil business and at night. A Slovene cognate term is *dahovina*, which conveys the idea of exhalation. Our old acquaintances the werewolves and vampires come into this category. According to Dr. Kelemina, even the great and good Kresnik, being restless in his grave, became a vampire after death. I wonder whether Bram Stoker got hold of something of this when he built up his novel *Dracula* out of the miscellaneous legendary material about vampires. The belief that even a person who was virtuous in life may be a noxious vampire after death may be based on the experience that it is unwholesome to meddle with spirits. "The ghost of the living is good, but the ghost of the dead is evil," said a Japanese friend to Lafcadio Hearn, precisely with reference to vampire manifestations. The Dead Lover, who comes by night for his sweetheart and wants to carry her off to the grave with him, has something in common with the vampire.

An interesting class of unpleasant beings are the *Vedomci*. A Vedomec is a human being, but born to become an evil warlock, just as a Kresnik is born to become a protector of men. The first peculiarity of a Vedomec is that he is born feet foremost. A new-born child may even be saved from the fate of growing up into a minister of evil by being passed into the bake-oven immediately after the new bread has been baked in it, and then passed out again head foremost. Or the child may be passed head foremost through the loops of a twisted vine. I fancy this ceremony is intended to represent a corrected birth. The association with bread and wine may be Christian or pre-Christian. It must be remembered that the vine was sacred to Kurent, always the great friend of man. In later life the Vedomec may be known by his heavy black eye-brows, and, according to some traditions, by his smooth, beardless face as well. There must be a reason why this particular type was fixed upon, but this is not the place for me to go into that.

The Vedomec—there is a female of the species as well, by the way—is a cross between a warlock and an evil elemental. At night his spirit leaves its body and he forgathers with others of his kind in hideous merrymaking, usually at a cross-roads. The Vedomci, male or female, flourish blazing torches; they butt each other like goats, and finally indulge in an unholy repast. Their favourite dish is human blood. If some unfortunate mortal should come across a pack of Vedomci at their nocturnal gathering, they catch him, skin him, and devour his flesh. Then they toss the bones about. In the end they collect the bones, piece them together, stuff them back into the skin, and restore their victim to life. But it will be a pallid, exhausted traveller, with a confused memory of ghastly happenings, who will continue his journey in the morning. If, however, he should carry some pointed object with the name of Christ engraved upon it, and cut the sign of the Cross on the ground with it, the Vedomci would have no power over him.

One of the local names for a sorcerer is *Vidovina*, the name of Kresnik's arch-enemy. All names for these warlock beings—*vešče*, *vida*, *vidovina*, *vedomec*, etc.—hint at *knowledge*, and perhaps *apparition* as well. Bald persons used to be suspected of being Vedomci who had butted off their hair at their nocturnal entertainments! Black-browed persons were also suspect, and, of course, sleep-walkers.

The *Mora*, our *nightmare*, is the best known of a class of evil spirits who seem to have no occupation or aim in their existence save to oppress people in their sleep.

A notable gathering-place of witches was Slivnica Hill, near Cerknica, famous because of its beautiful periodic lake. There is a cave near the top of the hill where the witches were supposed to brew the weather—mostly bad weather, of course.

A mysterious figure, dignified and not at all unattractive, is the Snake Queen, in some legends called Dark or Sorrowful Mara. Her kingdom was the kingdom of twilight or night, perhaps of death. She possessed a wonderful crown which was coveted by the princes who ruled in daylight. Her steward was a serpent with a dragon's head—Kačec. The rape of the Snake Queen's crown is a favourite theme in Slovene folk-tales; but only a hero of exceptional mould could hope to come through the adventure successful and alive. The daughter of the Snake Queen was almost as desirable as her crown. Query: is the Snake Queen in any way related to Mozart's Queen of Night in *The Magic Flute*?

Snakes are, anyhow, uncanny creatures. In Slovene folk-lore we sometimes find a snake as mystic guardian of the home, a good familiar who must on no account be harmed. Is it perhaps the vehicle of the spirit of some ancestor? On the other hand, heartless princesses and other noblewomen have a way of getting themselves turned into snakes. Snakes are sometimes guardians of treasure.

Finally, the Slovenes have tales of haunted spots, especially caves or castles or ruins; of ghosts doomed to guard treasure until some chosen mortal shall break the spell, inherit the treasure, and leave them to rest everlasting; of ghosts of unbaptised children, of familiars and spooks of all sorts of appearances and kinds.

Fairies and goblins form a special chapter, and a very rich one, in Slovene folk-lore. A goblin is called *Škrat*. The *škrati* are little fellows, not unlike our brownies. They know all about the wealth that is buried in the earth. Because of their underground interests they every now and again get mixed up with the Devil, which is neither just nor correct. But you can make a pact with a *Škrat* to supply you with worldly wealth (gold and gear) and you will do better with him than with the Devil, because at the worst he will only stipulate for your shadow; he has no use for your soul. It is true that persons who have bartered their shadow away to a *škrat* are apt to go off in a decline, but his power over them does not extend beyond death.

Speaking generally, fairies and goblins correspond more or less to the nymphs and fauns of the Greeks. They are pure elementals, who never were and never will be human. Fairies are sometimes called *Vile* (the usual Yugoslav term), sometimes *Božje deklice* (God's

handmaidens), *Bele žene* (White women, or rather ladies), *morske deklice* (mermaids), and very often *žal žene*. The word *žal* is a corruption of the German word *selig*; a *žal žena* is therefore one of the blessed, the beautiful, and the term implies much the same sort of meaning as *Božje deklice*. Dr. Kelemina says that all the fairies were originally water fairies, and that their queen is the spouse of the Ruler of the Universe and the prototype of all fairies. Here one finds oneself looking down a fascinating vista of mystic possibilities, which cannot be explored here and now. Common to all fairies is a radiant appearance.

The Slovene fairies often take an interest in human affairs. The White Ladies of the Triglav Range taught the Slovene settlers various arts of peace. Of course, they knew all about the herbs that grow in the forest and on the mountains. Sometimes a fairy would fall in love with a handsome mortal—farmer or hunter. The lucky man was usually bound over to keep the origin of his sweetheart (or wife) secret, on pain of losing her for ever. But the fairies were usually kind, and did not quite desert those to whom they had once given their love.

The Wild Men of the woods—*Divje Možje*—were often associated with the *žal žene*, or fairies. But they were savage, uncouth fellows, even suspected of cannibalism and of having dealings with the Wild Huntsman. Perhaps some of the tales about the lovely women and wild men of the woods are not so much legends of supernatural beings as garbled traditions of real men and women, of alien race, inhabitants of the sequestered glens and sheltered forests of the mountain ranges which the early Slovene settlers—thus much is abundantly clear from all their folk-lore—regarded as impenetrable and impassable for ordinary mortals.

A well-known Slovene elemental is the *Povodni Mož*—the Water Man of many a river, lake, or mountain tarn. A variant of the most widely spread legend of the Water Man is very pathetically told in Matthew Arnold's *Forsaken Merman*. Even the name of the merman's bride—Margaret—is correct. In Slovene folk-lore almost all the maidens and princesses who are kidnapped or kept prisoner by dragons, winter and water demons, sorcerers or demon lovers, etc., are called *Marjetica*, i.e. Margaret or *Daisy*. Could the bride of the genius of spring or of the sun have a better name?

The Water Maidens, too, incline to fall in love with human beings. Does anybody still read de la Motte Fouque's *Undine*? Because there we have the typical story of a Water Maiden who wedded a human-being. Of course, the legend as it is handed down

by the people is not nearly so elaborate; but the gist of it remains the same.

The Slovenes around Udine (*beneški Slovenci*) know a very unpleasant type of female forest elementals, the *Krivopetje* (Reversed Heels). Their feet are reversed—hence the name. They cause storms, steal children and eat them, and they live in caves.

Demons form a class by themselves in Slovene mythology and its legitimate development, folk-lore. Dr. Kelemina deals with them in one chapter with the giants. They have the monstrous stature in common, and the nebulous, overwhelming presence. Apart from that, and according to origin, they belong to widely different categories.

Some of the demons are unquestionably divinities. Their demoniac quality is not intrinsic but due to the way in which they are regarded by men. First in this order I should place the *Bela Žena*, who was at once the Queen of the Water Fairies, the Great Mother, and Spouse of the Ruler of the Universe. In all Slovene mythology I have found no image more grand or full of occult significance than that of the White Lady, as she washes her silvery feet in the clear spring by moonlight, on Christmas Eve, the night Our Lord is born, and the water is turned to wine about her feet.

Dr. Kelemina finds in the legend of Vida the Fair of Slovene and Croatian ballad poetry traces of a moon myth. Vida herself is the inconstant moon, and yet another aspect of the Spouse of the Ruler of the Universe. His reasons for this theory are quite convincing, but for the ordinary reader the ballad of Vida the Fair is interesting and attractive without any mythological interpretation.

Of a different, lower order are demons who obviously represent the untamed forces of Nature—elemental catastrophes or disturbances. *Ježi Baba* and *Jaga Baba*—the lady has several names and all of them indicate rage and hurry—is a storm fiend. All the winds are demons. From some tales one gathers that each day of the week has its genius or demon, which may be propitiated by honouring that day. The honour, be it noted, consists in not doing any work! *Torklja* or *Torka*, a horrible female demon who tears her victims to pieces and devours them, belongs more or less to this class; she has power over women who spin on a Tuesday. Legends of these demons are purely nightmarish, and remind me of Japanese demon stories as rendered by Lafcadio Hearn. They are winter fireside stories, and intended to make the flesh creep. *Mokožka* is a marsh demon. Mrs. Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić introduces her in one of her fairy tales in *Priče iz Davnine*.³

³ *Croatian Tales of Long Ago*. Allen & Unwin.

Vuorek is identified by Dr. Kelemina with *Orko* (*l'Orco*). He is also called *Podlegaj* by the Slovenes, from his trick of manifesting himself as a small beast of burden, a little donkey who gets between the legs of the benighted traveller and wants to be ridden. Once the man is astride the creature grows and grows . . . The remedy is to put a bridle or at least a halter on him, when he at once becomes tame and manageable. Dr. Kelemina suggests that *Orko* (*Vuorek*) possibly represents sudden gusts of wind. Judging by the kind of spot haunted by *Orko* I incline to think that he stands for the mountain streams that are apt to grow suddenly from tiny brooks into torrential rivers, but can be made useful to man if their power is properly harnessed. I was given a very fine version of the *Orko* story at Orebić (Peljesac, Dalmatia), with all the proper atmosphere and detail. A certain type of dragon is rightly classed with these demon elementals. They haunt caves, causing the subterranean waters to burst forth; earthquakes and thunderstorms are their work.

An interesting entity connected with natural phenomena is *Škopnjak*. He is primarily a meteor—a “falling star.” The Jugoslavs say that when a star falls somebody dies. Hence *Škopnjak* is a harbinger of death. He is also especially dangerous to babies, whom he likes to smother, or steal and exchange. He is supposed to fly across the sky on a blazing broomstick. His name is derived from *Škop* = a sheaf of corn. In some parts of the country it is a Shrove Tuesday custom to fix a sheaf of corn on a broomstick and then set fire to it.

Some giants are likewise elementals, for instance, the mountain giants. They pile up rocks, and so build up the mountain ranges. They are enormously strong, and if they choose to assume normal human proportions and to associate with ordinary mankind they get through a prodigious amount of work and display an appetite to match. With few exceptions they are a good-natured lot. The most recent version of various giant legends is the story of Martin Krpan, the strong man of Holy Trinity on the Hill. Fran Levstik's rendering of the story is exquisitely humorous and altogether masterly. It is one of the most delightful classics of Slovene literature.

Of a totally different order were the legendary “giant” peoples—the Ajdi, Romans, and Greeks (*Rimljani* and *Grki* or *Graki*), and the tales about them should often be classed for preference with what I have called distorted or garbled historic tradition. Of the Ajdi very little is known in fact, except that they built duns and

barrows. I am not an expert in the precise nomenclature of these structures, but I know that similar works at home are usually called by those names. The Slovenes were good farmers, a stock-raising and agricultural people, but had no idea of engineering. The "castles" of the Ajdi, the high roads of the Romans, and the massive masonry attributed to Greek and Roman troops and colonists, seemed to them too large to be the work of ordinary mortals; so they assumed these peoples to have been giants and have fathered a number of giant legends upon them.

The territory of the Slovenes is remarkably rich in unusual geological and geographical features. Of course, these have given rise to very many legends in which the origin of these freaks of nature is ascribed to supernatural agencies. Usually they are the work of witches, warlocks, or even the Devil himself. Sometimes they are due to a divine miracle. Of this type are the legends of the petrified woman not far from Bled (the Slovene Frau Hitt); of the Stone Hunter above Sv. Primož, near Kamnik; of the Devil's Wood above Kranj; the story of the Lovers of Cerknica (a Slovene version of the tale of Hero and Leander), and that of the origin of the Blood Pool near the summit of Krvavec (1,900 m.), near Kranj, with its semi-historic background, and any number of other tales.

The legends of the Flood might be included here. Dr. Kelemina quotes two. In one of them the pagan god Kurent plays a leading part, the other perhaps betrays a Christian influence. The description of the Slovene Flood is strikingly like the annual filling of any one of the periodic lakes of the Kras, only on a grand scale.

By the adoption of Christianity an entirely new set of names and personalities was introduced into Slovene legendary lore. In many cases the parts remained the same, and only the actors were changed. The Slav pagan thunder god was Perun. His place was taken by Sv. Ilij (St. Elias), doubtless because of the fiery chariot in which the prophet went up to heaven. Sv. Ilij loves to make play with the heavenly artillery, and therefore none of the saints or angels will tell him when is his name-day; because he would celebrate it with such a letting off of thunderstorms that the very babes in the womb would be shaken up! Are we to suppose that they would get *addled*?

A very curious legend, in which Christian and very ancient pagan elements are inextricably mixed, is attached to Sv. Matija (St. Matthew). He is not at all our St. Matthew the Evangelist. At his birth the Rojenice foretold of him that he would slay his father and mother. In spite of all precautions taken by the youth, who

was of a pious and gentle nature, the hideous prophecy was fulfilled to the letter, of course quite unintentionally. As a penance for this, his only crime, which he abhorred and had no desire to commit, Sv. Matija was commanded by God to build the "Roman" bridge, i.e. the rainbow. The epithet "Roman" is here tantamount to "titanic." During the building of the bridge the Devil made a supreme effort to get the saint into his power. Sv. Matija certainly outwitted the Evil One, but in revenge the Devil broke away the half of the bridge . . . and nobody has ever been able to replace it. And that is why we can never reach the spot where the rainbow ends, and there are so many precious things to be found there! Both Sv. Ilij and Sv. Matija are meteorological saints, so to say, but the real clerk of the weather is St. Peter. When we are told of a Barbara or Perperuna who produces rain or otherwise influences weather, I fancy we have to do with a being to whom the name and functions of Perun were transferred in a somewhat garbled fashion.

Among legends which belong distinctly to the Christian era while preserving pagan elements, Dr. Kelemina quotes one which would have delighted the heart of the old Scottish minister who concluded his prayer with the appeal: "An' noo, ma freens, let us pray for the Deil; there's naeboddy prays for the puir Deil." Because in this tale the Devil is not only converted but redeemed and brought back to salvation. But he is no longer the cold, green Devil of ancient Slovene folk-lore; he is a red Lucifer in a flame-red palace, and there are points about the story which recall the Tannhäuser legend.

With the establishment of Christianity in the Slovene lands we are well in historic and even comparatively recent times. In folk-lore we find legends which have an historic foundation, and new versions of old myths in which these have been elaborated into fairy tales or rationalised into stories about real or imaginary historic personages or events.

The historic era begins with the Coming of the Huns, extends over the subsequent ages of Avar predominance, the Frank occupation, which led to the German domination, the Turkish wars, and the slow preparation for our own age. To Slovene folk-lore it contributed, besides a host of lesser ones, one figure of titanic proportions and quality, *Kralj Matjaž*. The historical Kralj Matjaž was Mathias Corvinus, of Hungary, famous for his administrative genius and his successful campaigns against the Turks. Mathias Corvinus was adopted whole-heartedly by the Slovenes as their national hero. At the end of his reign, Kralj Matjaž did not die, but—like others of his kind—he retired into a mountain where he

sleeps unto this day with his Black Host of warriors around him. When the Mighty Smith had done with this earth there was no place for him in heaven and the Devil would not have him. So he betook himself to his old master, Kralj Matjaž, in the mountain, and there he still is, fashioning arms against the day when they will be needed. For the day will come when Kralj Matjaž will issue forth from the mountain with his host. He will defeat the enemies of the faith of his people, and all will be well. Some say that when the end of the world will be at hand . . . within seven years . . .

So far as I have heard, the king sleeps in at least four mountains. We in Upper Carniola (and the mountaineers and ski-runners in particular) favour Mount Bogatin as his residence. It should be noted that all his mountains are important strategic points on the Slovene frontier.

Beyond being a legendary enlargement of his historic self, Kralj Matjaž is undoubtedly the shadow and latter-day counterpart of Kresnik, of the tribal god, from the dawn of a people's memory until—yes, to this very day.

Dr. Kelemina suggests that the opposite to King Matjaž was an equally remarkable semi-historic personality, to wit, the King of the Dogheads. It seems safe to assume, with Dr. Kelemina, that the historic character underlying that of the legendary King of the Dogheads was Attila, the Scourge of God. Most of the legends and traditions about him quoted by Dr. Kelemina in his book are taken from the Italian border or from Croatian tradition. It does not follow at all that the Slovenes had no traditions about him. It seems more likely that they are lost or have not yet been traced again. Unfortunately, Dr. Kelemina suggests no explanation why, in one legend, the chief of the Dogheads should bear the name of *Marko*. It is not a Slovene name. In view of the origin of the legend quoted, it may be connected with the patron of Venice—another arch-enemy of the Slavs—but certainly has nothing whatever to do with the Serbian national hero, Kraljević Marko. The King of the Dogheads, whether Attila or Pes (i.e. "Dog") Marko, is the typical Tartar as the Slovenes saw him. The Goths believed the Huns to be descendants of witches who had been banished into the desert and there had unholy intercourse with the demons of the wilderness. The Slovenes fully endorsed this view, and the Tartar king was to them not only a man with a canine cast of countenance but the accursed offspring of an unhappy woman and a dog.

It is in this category of semi-historic tales and traditions that Dr. Kelemina gives several versions of the theme of the Maiden's

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Leap. The site of this act of desperation is always a great cliff rising sheer from the water. The origin of the story may be threefold : we may be dealing with a true myth with occult significance, with a legend which is a " rationalised " version of the myth, or even with an historic incident, the three elements being inextricably blended in one narrative.

A curious mixture of archaic features and relatively modern detail appears in tales in which the (German) noble is almost invariably the ruthless tormentor and oppressor of the (Slovene) serf. As often as not, the wicked nobleman is the Devil himself in a new guise.

Finally, Dr. Kelemina has something to say about superstitions. He mentions the curious belief that fern seed, especially if come by unwittingly, confers the power to understand the speech of animals.

Of course, one meets a fair number of old friends among these popular myths and tales of the Slovenes ; but I, for my part, have found fewer than I expected. The story of Big Claus and Little Claus (only the names are naturally not the same) occurs in a form very similar to that given to it by Andersen. Several tales are to be found in Grimm's collection. Kurent's vine was surely grown in the same nursery garden as Jack's beanstalk. One or two giants are ogres of the familiar " Fee-fo-fum " species. But one is struck by the fact that very few of the tales have a happy ending. Over and over again, the fortunate one who ought to have raised the treasure and broken the spell that binds its guardians loses courage at the critical moment and the golden opportunity is gone for ever. A people ignored and belittled, at the worst hewers of wood and drawers of water for their overlords, and at the best held in political and intellectual tutelage, knew little of the " living happily ever after " which is the ideal conclusion for fairy-tales. One misses the exquisite optimism of the *Beauty and the Beast* or *Cinderella*. Only one tale in Dr. Kelemina's book is reminiscent of these, and that is the lovely story of Kozorog, the young count with the Steinbock's horn.

I have not even attempted here to do more than give an indication of the wealth of material collected and hinted at in Dr. Kelemina's book, despite its modest dimensions. Still less should this paper of mine be taken as the work of an expert in Slovene folk-lore, although in writing it I have had the benefit of assistance from Slovene friends who are well versed in the traditions of their people. In compiling his book Dr. Kelemina has undoubtedly rendered an inestimable service to the cause of folk-lore study among his

immediate countrymen and to lovers and students of folk-lore all the world over.

A slightly abridged English version of Dr. Kelemina's interesting Introduction, with footnotes by myself, will appear shortly in *Folklore*.

Mrs. Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* (Allen & Unwin) give a valuable insight into mythological traditions among the Jugoslavs of the north-western part of the kingdom. Several of the Slovene ballads, notably that of *Vida the Fair*, have been translated into English by Mr. James Wiles.

FANNY S. COPELAND.

THE following are two of the most characteristic of Slovene Folk Tales, in so far, especially, as they deal with specifically Slovene traditions.

My translation of "Zlatorog" follows the version given by Dr. Kelemina in his *Bajke in Pripovedke Slovenskega Ljudstva* pretty closely, and wherever my text differs from his, it is because I have preferred to make use of local tradition, obtained from friends who are well acquainted with it.

In my version of the "Desetnica" I have combined Dr. Kelemina's text with that of Miss Manica Kumanova, so as to embody all the most characteristic moments of that *motif*. I am assured, on good authority, that the "tenth brother" and "tenth sister" were *compelled* to leave home, and that there was originally no question of their leaving—as both Dr. Kelemina and Miss Kumanova assume—of their own accord, and because of some mysterious wander fever on their own part. The traditional temperament of the "tenth brother" was the result of the custom, not the cause of it. In my English version I have carefully avoided ambiguity on that score.

ZLATOROG

(A Slovene Folk Tale)

THREE thousand feet above beautiful Lake Bohinj in Upper Carniola lies the high-level valley called *Zajezerska Dolina*, which means *The Valley of the Lakes*. The upper part of it, in especial, is a sad wilderness, all limestone rocks and boulders, like an immense untidy furrow ploughed all the way down the southern slopes of the Triglav Range. It is the track of the prehistoric Triglav glacier, and the "lakes" from which the valley takes its name are little